|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | * **6**
 |
|  | **A Question of Balance:****Balancing Rights and Responsibilities** |
| What’s the Point? | When we discuss God’s justice we have to ask the question “*What are the basic rights guaranteed to us?*” We have a pretty good idea from the Commandments and the Beatitudes what we should do, but what do they tell us about the basic rights of each of us, and after that how do we balance the two when approaching social justice – especially with the approaching election, which for us as Americans is often about our “rights”? Ultimately we must understand our political liberties, rights, and responsibilities *only as we understand them as Catholics*, and seek to turn secular understanding towards God’s understanding. |
| **Background Information** | ***Reference**** ***CCC****: ¶ 2401-2463 (****2459****,* ***2461****)*
* **NAB** : *1 Tim 5-6;Gal 6:2-10; 2 Thes 3:6-15;*

The Commandments help us to understand how we are to act towards God and towards one another. The Beatitudes call us beyond ourselves to see what effect our actions have in the world around us and on ourselves. But we seem unable to rectify these ‘God-evident’ truths with the “self-evident” ones defined by our Constitution and Bill of Rights, even though the two claim to be from the same source.The Catholic approach to faithful citizenship begins with moral principles, not party platforms. The directions for our public witness are found in Scripture and Catholic social teaching. These themes anchor our Faith Community's role in public life. They help us to resist excessive self-interest, blind partisanship, and ideological agendas. They also help us avoid extreme distortions of pluralism and tolerance that deny any fundamental values and dismiss the contributions and convictions of believers. As the Vatican's statement on public life explains ( <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021124_politica_en.html> ), we cannot accept an understanding of pluralism and tolerance that suggests “*every possible outlook on life [is] of equal value*.” However, this insistence that there are fundamental moral values “*has nothing to do with the legitimate freedom of Catholic citizens to choose among the various political opinions that are compatible with faith and the natural moral law, and to select, according to their own criteria, what best corresponds to the needs of the common good*.”But just how do we go about selecting “*according to their own criteria*”? First, aside from reading the fullness of that fine document, we have to spend some time examining what we think and what drives our “criteria”. We Americans are big on ‘rights’; our country is founded on “certain inalienable rights”; our democracy and constitution are a model for countries around the world; rights are important to us. Especially individual rights, at least in the last century or so. Until around 1830 or so the individual rights of white, male land owners were paramount to the understanding of these inalienable rights; soon after that, with the election of Andrew Jackson, the idea of ‘democratic’ broadened.Today the idea of rights as “guaranteed” by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights Civil seems to be interpreted in such a way as to trump the *common good* in favor of the individual’s. How does that happen? We have broadened the understanding of who has rights, but narrowed it by over-emphasizing the protection of their *subjective* meaning. Hence an individual’s ability to ‘choose’ (whatever that means) outweighs the common good.This is nothing new. We can see the struggle the founding fathers had amongst themselves as to the balance: Hamilton thought that order was more important than rights; Madison thought the power of the legislature should be greater than that of the executive branch; Washington, thought that a rigid, military-like structure would overcome the chaos of the previous Articles of Confederation; Jefferson thought that a little chaos now and then would be the greatest strength. But what are they thinking about? Is their focus on rights and liberties the same as ours? Have we changed or improved the understanding? And just what is the nature of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights? Are they rigid, self-contained documents or are the fluid and open to change? **The American Way**The American government and system of democracy is a reaction to previous ‘unitary’ types of government in which a strong central power exercised complete control and the rights and liberties of the individual were subservient to the rights of the crown, or the landowner, or whoever held the power. Our original government, a confederation, which had a weak central government and strong state governments was their first solution. Under a confederation, local government, which in our case, in relation to the central federal government, is the State’s, is supreme. The central government derives its powers from the states. The weakened central government left us open to all sorts of problems, both internally and externally. The second (and more lasting) try, Federalism, is a compromise meant to eliminate the disadvantages of both the unitary and the confederated systems. In a federal system, power is shared by the national *and* state governments by a somewhat vague division of powers. The fathers achieved this in our Constitution by designating certain powers as belonging to the central government, and others to the state governments. But not without contention, and calls for amendments and a spelled out Bill of Rights were still necessary.But the Constitution remains the foundational document laying out that relationship between powers. As an additional measure, a strong triune system of balancing powers at the federal level was created and is mirrored at the state level. Still, as mentioned above, the endeavor to balance federal and state’s rights shifts with the 1830 election of Andrew Jackson; it explodes eventually into the Civil War; it shifts further in the early 20th century with Roosevelt’s New Deal and multiple terms. Individual entitlement broadened and even during the “New Federalism” of Nixon and Reagan, the Courts began to define individual rights in decisions like Roe v. Wade. The effect being that we have moved past the original spirit of the document and begun to equate liberties and rights and at the same time transferred this idea of ‘group-individual’ rights to individuals. We have begun to equate ‘liberty’ and ‘right’ with ‘doing what *I* want’. It means less what we as Americans believe, and more what *I* want other Americans to believe. I begin to define what ‘patriot’ and ‘American’ mean and how to interpret the Constitution; your rights, your liberties, are based on what *I* think you deserve (do not worry, this prejudice is true for both sides of the aisle. For a judgment as to the success of this type of thinking, see the Reformation).Which brings up an interesting question, especially for us as Catholics: *What is the difference between a liberty and a right?* Is there one? Both words appear in our most basic documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. The distinction has never been very clear, even from these documents, and today the concepts are often used interchangeably. That notwithstanding, they do refer to different kinds of protections which the documents designate as ‘guaranteed’.**Liberties and Rights**In brief what we are talking about is the difference between theory and praxis. The 1960’s did a lot to define our modern understanding of Civil Rights but what has always been true (even during the times where it has been tested and failed) is the broader idea of our ‘Civil Liberties’, i.e. those things which are *‘protections’ for all Americans against government actions*. For example, the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights is known as the “Freedom of Religion” amendment. Basically it guarantees citizens the right to practice whatever religion they please without the government interfering by designating a religious preference or by preventing religions from being practiced. What we focus on is that guarantee of an individual’s ‘liberty’ from the actions of the government in the legitimate exercise of their religion and the lack of government interference in an individual's ‘freedom of worship’ (notice I say legitimate, but who determines that, right?)Civil rights, in contrast, refer to *positive actions of government* *should take to create equal conditions for all Americans*, an aspect of what we understand as ‘justice’, like Affirmative Action. The term ‘civil rights’ is often associated with the protection of minority groups, such as African Americans, Hispanics, or women (not necessarily from other groups but mainly from the government). This recognition of rights acts as a counterbalance to the democratic idea of ‘majority rule’ where minorities often find themselves outvoted, thereby protecting their ‘rights’ in action not just in theory.**The Catholic Understanding**We Catholics think of ‘rights’ and ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ somewhat differently. Ours is based in God’s definition of these things, what we know as ‘justice’. We seek to mesh the two together, using God’s definition as our guide. This is not to say that we come up with some lukewarm amalgamation mishmash of God and human, but bring human understanding and exercise up to God’s standard. This is not easy. Sometimes we get confused by human argumentation, or reason out that human exercise is as good as God’s. Since we are not God, sometimes we struggle in trying to put His word into action.*1 Timothy* 5 has an interesting example of a set of rules/admonishments which illustrate the struggle to balance rights and responsibilities in terms of God’s will:“*Honor widows who are truly widows.* *But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let these first learn to perform their religious duty to their own family and to make recompense to their parents, for this is pleasing to God.* *The real widow, who is all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.* *But the one who is self-indulgent is dead while she lives.* *Command this, so that they may be irreproachable.* *And whoever does not provide for relatives and especially family members has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* *Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years old, married only once,* *with a reputation for good works, namely, that she has raised children, practiced hospitality, washed the feet of the holy ones, helped those in distress, involved herself in every good work.* *But exclude younger widows, for when their sensuality estranges them from Christ, they want to marry* *and will incur condemnation for breaking their first pledge.* *And furthermore, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies as well, talking about things that ought not to be mentioned.* *So I would like younger widows to marry, have children, and manage a home, so as to give the adversary no pretext for maligning us.* *For some have already turned away to follow Satan.* *If any woman believer has widowed relatives, she must assist them; the church is not to be burdened, so that it will be able to help those who are truly widows*.” (*1 Tim* 5:3-16)This illustration is about female widows, but it is applicable to all of us, especially perhaps the part about younger widows. It also points out that everything is not black and white – there are extenuating circumstances; not all are ‘widows’ – what is the definition of a widow? Just because one is in need – a widow is someone who has no one but God to take care of her – does not mean that they are done living out their baptism. So let us bring that to today’s topic. Sometimes our political ideologies color our responses to the needs of others. We have to slow down and ask ourselves questions using the guidelines given us by the Commandments and the Beatitudes. In the end, the pericope shows us that while it is not easy, it must be done, and not as we humans see it but as God commands it. Looking at the passage as a guide, let us explore some of the questions it raises. How much responsibility do we have to one another? What ideas guide us in our actions? What rights, and by rights meaning what does the community ‘owe’ individuals (again, think in terms of the definition of ‘justice’ – God giving us what we *need*), do they get? What responsibilities do they have? For example they must be giving, “*irreproachable”*, with “*a reputation for good works*” and if young they have to move on with their lives, being fruitful and generous members of the community.Our job then, is to tie the social, secular understanding of rights and responsibilities to our Catholic definition of the same, that is to say, understand how the secular State should define and act on these things not as humans would understand and define them but as God does. Certainly and without question for us, God’s Law comes before human law – if we do not believe this then we are wasting our time. Our job is to *ACT*, to *Transform* society to be driven by God’s sense of justice not our own. Ideologies and parties have no place within our understanding of God’s will. We are the baptized, the Body of Christ, first and foremost and it colors and informs all of our thinking on any matter. Period. Pure and simple.We love the sinner and hate the sin. Apply that through our ‘seamless garment’ concept to everything. Are there people who take advantage of the system? Yes. Does that mean that we are not obligated to love them? As Catholics, we are Catholics first and Americans second (not that the Pope has more allegiance than the President but in the way we think about how the world is supposed to operate). Our Catholic brothers and sisters live everywhere, under every form of government and every form of liberty and oppression. We Catholics owe God’s justice to everyone regardless of situation or means not just here at home but *everywhere*. Our government provides us a unique avenue to accomplish God’s will (but even then, it is only one avenue). Ultimately, we are Americans and we must translate these Catholic ideas to our leaders and through them into legislation which benefits all and gets at the root of problems, that is, which help to bring justice. The idea which the bishops promote is that of “Faithful Citizenship.” We seek “*liberty and justice for all*” – God’s justice not human – and we are called to participate in and transform the society around us. We are called to form our conscience not just for our initial voting but in order to help us realize that thinking and acting is for everything, and that voting and living in America are subsets of being Catholic, not the other way around. As the bishops guide to us says, no matter who we vote for, or even who wins, we are mandated by our Faith to make sure that they are aware that we Catholics expect certain things of ourselves and our elected leaders, that they will:* Address the preeminent requirement to protect the weakest in our midst especially innocent unborn children.
* Keep our nation from turning to violence to address fundamental problems.
* Protect marriage and the family.
* Protect both citizens and immigrants through comprehensive and humane laws.
* Actively seek solutions for the poor and marginalized.
* Establish and comply with moral limits on the use of military force.
* Join with others around the world to pursue peace, protect human rights and religious liberty, and advance economic justice and care for creation.

Notice how these things cross ideological lines. No matter who wins, they are human and bring prejudices and sinfulness to their office, just as we often do in our daily lives. We vote not for the ideology or the person but for Justice. The rights we receive, protect, and distribute as Americans are only those which we *need*, the ones which God has decreed as necessary for our life – not those which we, through prejudice, selfishness, or ignorance determine to be rights. “*Whoever teaches something different and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the religious teaching* *is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid disposition for arguments and verbal disputes. From these come envy, rivalry, insults, evil suspicions,* *and mutual friction among people with corrupted minds, who are deprived of the truth, supposing religion to be a means of gain…* *For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it.* *If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that*.” (*1 Tim* 6:3-5,7-8)Because of our devotion to God, we are called to do good (*Amos* 5:14-15), and that devotion brings the benefits of Justice: the things each individual *needs*. We balance rights and responsibilities not by human standards but by God’s standard, meaning that everyone gets what they need and everyone works for the good of others. Okay, but what about the *real world*? What about the “Welfare Queens” and the “Robber Barons”? That is where our *Actions*, based in prayerful *Reflection* bear fruit in the *Transformation* of others and the world. We live our responsibilities first, not worrying (i.e. judging) about how others live them; that is to say, we challenge, cajole, protest, and urge others to view the world through God’s eyes – we do not dine on smug self-righteousness. Jesus reminds us again and again to act, not judge. (c.f. *Mt* 7:1, 5) We are not called to judge the character of another, but to act with justice and make sure others have what they need.Only then will the Peace of Christ, a peace the world cannot give, be available to all. As Paul the VI said, “*If you want peace, work for Justice*!”Today then, our discussion of the understanding of rights and responsibilities is to challenge the teens (and ourselves) to think first as God thinks, and to define the terms through Catholic doctrine and not through human or historical means. Once we understand the purpose of our participation in government and our country as furthering the Kingdom then it changes the way we evaluate laws, politicians, and government power and purpose, as well as our role within them. We seek the peace and protection that comes not from the world but from God – *a peace the world cannot give* (cf. *Jn* 14:27). |
| Materials Needed | * PowerPoint
* Computer
* Overhead projector
 |
| **Attention Grabber** |  ***Where Do You Draw The Line?*  (3 min)** |
| Using the questionnaire provided, challenge the teens to quickly fill it out being truthful. Explain that these are not hard questions or are they meant to accuse anyone of anything. They are merely questions about their situation. **The Gist**The first 5 questions are about the person reading the survey; the last 5 questions are about how the reader acts toward others. Once they answer the 10 questions we'll tell them to connect the "dots" and then imagine that drawn line resting on a scale. Which "side" is weighing heavier on their heart? |
| **Outline** | **Prayer**:  | *Mk 12:14-17.* |
| **Presentation**:  | *PowerPoint.* |
| **Activity**:  | *Stone Soup* |
| **Table Discussion**:  | *Questions*. |
| **Post Discussion:** | *None* |
| **Closing Prayer**:  | *Group Prayer/Petitions.* |
| **Prayer** | **Introductory Prayer:** (**2 min,** after candle is lit…**)*****Mk 12:14-17****They came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion. You do not regard a person’s status but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or should we not pay?”* *Knowing their hypocrisy he said to them, “Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at.”* *They brought one to him and he said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They replied to him, “Caesar’s.”* *So Jesus said to them, “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” They were utterly amazed at him.* |
| **Pre-discussion Presentation** | Presentation (15 min) |
|  | How does the passage apply to what we have been talking about? It asks an important question “*What is our relationship to the world around us?*” Jesus tells us to be aware that human government and interaction is not something we should shy away from. That is what we have been talking about: engaging and transforming ourselves *and* the world around us.Refresher: The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching and Being an AmericanThe Church’s social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of Scripture, papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. Key themes include:* [Life and Dignity of the Human Person](http://www.ccctx.org/fc_cst_life.php)
* [Call to Family, Community, and Participation](http://www.ccctx.org/fc_cst_family.php)
* [Rights and Responsibilities](http://www.ccctx.org/fc_cst_rights.php)
* [Option for the Poor and Vulnerable](http://www.ccctx.org/fc_cst_poor.php)
* [Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers](http://www.ccctx.org/fc_cst_work.php)
* [Solidarity](http://www.ccctx.org/fc_cst_solidarity.php)
* [Caring for God's Creation](http://www.ccctx.org/fc_cst_creation.php)

Source: *Catholic Charities of Central Texas* The question for us, is how do we as Americans put this into practice not just in our everyday lives but in terms of Transforming the society around us as well? Especially in a society which is suspicious of or even down-right hostile to Catholics? First we become strong in our Faith, and an understanding of the teachings of that faith. Next we challenge the society around us to examine and take on these teachings in order to guide ourselves and our society.**Ten Steps Toward Justice and Peace** (group activity)**Action and Advocacy**Remember the two feet of social justice: action and advocacy?Which of the questions from the Ten Steps activity might be listed under action? Under advocacy?Action often seems to be the first step taken by people on their journey toward justice and people do not always take the next step of advocacy (it is not automatic). Why?What ultimately controls a person’s ability to walk? (going for “the brain” here)In the journey towards justice, it is no different. It is our mind’s ability to reflect on the actions being taken that leads some to consider the changes that are needed to a alter the situation. Seeking ways to change the way things are presently done in order to change systems or processes is what advocacy is all about.**A River Full of Babies** (a parable)There are two steps toward addressing a need or problem – direct action and attention to changing the cause of it.**Survival and Thrival**The rights that are necessary for people to live are known as **survival rights** (ie: food, shelter, basic health care).But God does not want creation merely to survive, but to thrive and flourish. So beyond survival rights, Catholic social teaching insists that all human beings also have a right to those things necessary for them to fully realize their God-given dignity… **thrival rights** (i.e.: education, employment, a safe environment, enough material goods to support a family, right to live by one’s conscience and religion, to immigrate, and to live without discrimination).**Responsibilities**While Catholic social teaching affirms the importance of rights, it also says that rights are not unlimited. An individual’s rights are limited by his or her responsibilities for the good of others, as well as for the common good of the whole society.All people have the right to own property (land, cars, clothes, money, etc.), but Catholic social teaching says that everything in the world is a gift given by God for the good of ALL people, both now and in the future. So people have a responsibility to care for their property, and to use it to promote their own human dignity as well as the dignity of their families and all members of society. When some people have more property than they really need, while others do not have enough to maintain a dignified life, then those with more have a responsibility to fulfill their neighbors’ right to the necessities of a good life.*Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty.* Archbishop Oscar Romero["A River Full of Babies" (attached parable)Refer to two feet of social justice and ARTHandout: Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching from Catholic Charities: [www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org). Ten Steps Toward Justice and Peace (attached) Key Principle: Rights & Responsibilities:Big Picture - World Awareness (working on this - global issues/statistics) ]We attain some of these goals as Americans, by voting, but also by continuing to hold up God’s will to our elected leaders and each other. We must be aware of the injustices we cause as well as take responsibility for the ones our government causes. We must help the world around us understand Justice, God’s Justice, and the correct understanding of rights and liberties in our society, as well as leading them to follow Jesus’ example of Justice for the common good, not just the good of the few.The activities of this lesson are designed to give us a better grasp of how we should think about and approach some social issues. |
| **Activity / Table Talk** | Table Discussion (35 min) |
|  |  Each table takes a scripture passage below to identify the right/responsibility it speaks to. Illustrate on poster board and hang around the room. Want to be sure we make them aware of the basic rights (survival) and those to preserve one's dignity (thrival). 1. **Deuteronomy 5:17**
2. **Deuteronomy 30:19**
3. **Sirach 34:22** (rights of workers)
4. **Psalm 146:5-8** (freedom from oppression)
5. **Isaiah 10:1-2** (against unjust laws)

**Additional Questions**1. What is ‘liberty’?
2. List 10 things that you think are rights.
3. Take your list and evaluate each one by deciding, if it is a right or a privilege? (consider the Catholic understanding of rights and justice) What makes each one a right or a privilege?
4. Why are responsibilities associated with rights?
5. Have you ever used your God given gifts to help provide basic rights to others?
6. Is voting important? Is it a right? Why or why not?
7. How does it help provide basic rights to others?
 |
| Post-Discussion Activity | ***Posters* (10 min).**  |
|  | Share posters. |
| Closing | **Announcements and Prayer (5 min).**  |
|  | **Group Prayer**Intercessions *Prayer for Basic Rights* *From Being Neighbor: The Catechism and Social Justice*, USCCB, April, 1998Lord of Wisdom, awaken us to our duty to care for the basic needs of all people. Strengthen with hope people denied their human rights and freedoms. Provide us all with the voice to cry out for justice for the poor and the oppressed.Amen |
| Reminder | **\*\*\*\* REMEMBER IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING ATTENDANCE!!** This is a legal document! Please, write down on your attendance sheet the name of any teen at your table, whether they are on your roll or not. |
| Attachments | **Below:*** *Where Do You Draw the Line?*
* *A River Full of Babies*
* *Ten Steps Toward Justice and Peace*
* *Relevant References in Catholic Social Teachings*
 |

**Where Do You Draw The Line?**

*Fill in the circle to indicate your answer.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Do you live in an apartment or a house? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Have you ever lived in subsidized housing? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Does your family own at least one vehicle? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Did you eat out this past week? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Do you have more than five pairs of pants to wear in the cold weather? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Are you current with your vaccine inoculations? (immunizations) |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Have you ever helped anyone who is homeless? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Have you ever provided transportation for someone who didn’t have their own? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Have you ever shared your meal with, or given food to someone who didn’t have any? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Have you ever donated one of your old coats to someone needy? |
|  | yes ○ | no ○ | Have you ever contributed to a fund established for the medical expenses of someone else? |

**A River Full of Babies**

a parable to illustrate the point of the need for both action and advocacy

One day the people of a certain village were having a picnic along the shore of the river. During the festivities, one of the townsfolk saw a basket floating down the river and added in to retrieve it. She was amazed to see that a baby was inside and quickly brought it safely to shore.

Just as she got to shore, other townsfolk spotted more baskets floating down the river. Several of the people jumped in and rescued those babies as well.

Soon, dozens of babies came floating down the river in baskets requiring the townsfolk to develop a “basket brigade” on the spot in order to save all the babies. Despite their best efforts, more and more baskets with babies came floating down the river.

As everyone else was busy in the rescue efforts to save the babies, two of the townspeople started to run away along the shore of the river.

“Where are you going?” shouted one of the rescuers. “We need you here to help us save these babies!”

They shouted back, “We are going upstream to stop whoever is throwing them in!”

(Author unknown)

**Ten Steps Toward Justice and Peace**

Line everyone up in a single row at one end of the room and the leader at the opposite end of the room. Tell them that you will read ten different actions; they should take one normal step forward for any item that applies. The one who is closest to the leader after all ten have been read will win a prize. Remind them that they are on an honor system for their answers.

*Step forward if…*

1. you have consoled someone who has been teased by others.
2. you have confronted the people teasing the person without putting them down.
3. you ever helped break up a fight or stopped some act of violence.
4. you have been trained as a peer mediator or in conflict resolutions skills.
5. you have befriended a person from a cultural background different from yours.
6. you have spent time reflecting on how your own prejudicial attitudes and behaviors have impacted others.
7. you have worked with the homeless or poor in your community.
8. you have written a letter to a town, city, or government representative asking that more be done to change the current situation of homelessness and poverty.
9. you have participated in an event to help raise money to benefit those in need.
10. you have participated in learning or educational programs that helped you understand why those people are in need.

Bonus: you are willing to share whatever prize you win with the rest of the group!

Source: *2004 Youth Ministry Resource Manual,* pp. 25-6

## ****Relevant References in Catholic Social Teachings****:

Here are some key themes at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.

## ****Principle/Theme:****

## Rights and Responsibilities

Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible, and a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life. The right to exercise religious freedom publicly and privately by individuals and institutions along with freedom of conscience need to be constantly defended. In a fundamental way, the right to free expression of religious beliefs protects all other rights. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. Rights should be understood and exercised in a moral framework rooted in the dignity of the human person.

## References from the Catechism

**2459** - Man is himself the author, center, and goal of all economic and social life. The decisive point of the social question is that goods created by God for everyone should in fact reach everyone in accordance with justice and with the help of charity.

**2461** - True development concerns the whole man. It is concerned with increasing each person's ability to respond to his vocation and hence to God's call (cf. CA 29).

<http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/>

## Scriptural Foundations

Catholic social teaching recognizes three sets of rights: the right to life (including food 7 shelter), economic rights (including education and employment), and political and cultural rights (including religious freedom). With rights come responsibilities to others, to our families and to the common good of all.

### Right to life

**Deuteronomy 5:17** <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy5.htm>

**Deuteronomy 30:19** <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy30.htm>

**Sirach 34:22** (rights of workers) <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/sirach/sirach34.htm>

**Psalm 146:5-8** (freedom from oppression) <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm146.htm>

**Isaiah 10:1-2** (against unjust laws) <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah10.htm>

**SOURCES:** [**http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/) **& Leader’s Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, USCCB. 2001.**